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THE HORROR OF DEATH: A FOUCAULDIAN READING OF POWER RELATIONS IN *HEART OF DARKNESS* AND *APOCALYPSE NOW*

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ABSTRACT: Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* (1899) addresses the brutality underlying Europe's colonisation of Africa. Its film adaptation, *Apocalypse Now* (1979), shows the US Army's radical practices in the Vietnam War. A comparative study of power relations on both works will help understand the workings of power in extreme sociopolitical circumstances devoid of a democratic environment. This article analyses both cultural products under the theoretical framework of Michel Foucault's writings on power. Three conceptual nuclei where power relations emanate are scrutinised independently: imperialism and the resulting local resistance; internal hierarchies in colonial organisations; and the role of gender. The analysis shows that absolute power is intolerable, death its ultimate limit, and confession its main liberating mechanism.

KEYWORDS: Foucault, *Heart of Darkness*, *Apocalypse Now*, power, film adaptation

El horror de la muerte: una lectura foucaultiana sobre las relaciones de poder en *Heart of Darkness* y *Apocalypse Now*

RESUMEN: La novela corta *Heart of Darkness* (Joseph Conrad, 1899) aborda la brutalidad existente en la colonización europea de África. Su adaptación cinematográfica, *Apocalypse Now* (1979), muestra las prácticas radicales acometidas por el ejército de los Estados Unidos en la Guerra de Vietnam. Un estudio comparativo sobre relaciones de poder en ambos trabajos ayudará a comprender cómo funciona el poder en circunstancias sociopolíticas extremas. Este artículo analiza ambos productos culturales bajo el marco teórico de los textos sobre poder de Michel Foucault. Tres núcleos conceptuales de donde emanan las relaciones de poder se examinan independientemente: el imperialismo y la resistencia resultante; las jerarquías internas en organizaciones coloniales; y el rol del género. El análisis muestra que el poder absoluto es intolerable, que la muerte es su límite definitivo y que la confesión es su principal mecanismo de liberación.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Foucault, *Heart of Darkness*, *Apocalypse Now*, poder, adaptación cinematográfica

1. INTRODUCTION

Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* (1899) depicts the colonisation of Africa based on commercial goals. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola, its film adaptation, *Apocalypse Now* (1979), examines American imperialism in the Vietnam war. Both works depict a journey along a river in search of a mysterious character who transcends the boundaries of power bestowed upon him by the organisation he works for –the trading company's Mr. Kurtz in the book, the US Army's Colonel Kurtz in the movie. In both cases, the story is focalised by the officer in charge of the search –Marlow in the novella, Willard in the film–, who eventually finds a Kurtz that is both powerful beyond expectations, but also tormented by the atrocities beheld when yielding that power, as attested by both Kurtzes' final statement: "The horror! The horror!". Much scholarly attention has been placed on both works –especially Conrad's–, mostly from postcolonialist and feminist critical perspectives. Except for Worthy's feminist analysis (1996) and Sun's study of imperialist ideology in both works (2019), the relationship between the novella and the film has been addressed mostly alluding to the representational value of the movie as an adaptation of the book: Kinder (1980), Bogue (1981), Hagen (1981), Harrell (1982), Gillespie (1985), Cahir (1992), Greiff (1992), Kuchta (1994), Hawley (1996), Díaz Cuesta (1997), Vargas (2004), Maslowski (2007), Gelly (2010) or Lirca (2016), among others. Since one of the most important elements in both works is the exercise of power in social situations deprived of democratic stability –colonial and military settings–, the present article scrutinises the power relations between the members of different nations or ethnic groups –the European colonisers and the African inhabitants in the book; the American military and the Vietnamese in the film–, within the organisations involved –the trading company and the US Army, respectively– and across the male/female gender divide.

Before proceeding further, the very notion of power must be specified. The Cambridge Dictionary defines *power* as the "ability to control people and events", "the amount of political control a person or group has in a country", and "an official or legal right to do something". As to the workings of power, French philosopher Michel Foucault states that "[p]ower is everywhere [...] because it comes from everywhere" (1978, 93). For him, power is not defined as unidirectional, but

> as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies (1978, 92-93).

A key Foucauldian concept is that of confession as an instrument of power, an apparent will of "truth" demanding to surface, and one "so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us" (1978, 60). Charlie Marlow's narrative voice explicitly uses the formula "I confess" twice in *Heart of Darkness*. In *Apocalypse Now*, Captain Willard's voice-over speaks of Colonel Kurtz in the following terms: "There was no way to tell his story without telling my own. And if his story is really a confession, then so is mine". For Foucault, "one confesses one's crimes, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires, one's illnesses and troubles; […]. One confesses […] the things people write books about. One confesses–or is forced to confess" (1978, 59).

I will rely on Foucault's theory (1978; 1980) to examine the way in which power relations shape the events occurring in *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now*, paying attention to their parallels and contrasts. Additionally, apart from power relations related to imperialism and resistance, organizational hierarchies, and gender, another kind of power will also be addressed, namely the power of representation, as it stems from the very nature of the artistic work.

2. "EXTERMINATE ALL THE BRUTES": IMPERIALISM AND RESISTANCE

Common definitions of *imperialism* usually focus on its economic goals. Edward Said proposes a wider account of the term: "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory" (1994, 9). *Heart of Darkness* addresses European colonisation in late nineteenth-century Africa, identifying the city of Brussels as the colonial metropolis and the Congo Free State as the distant territory under Western control.[1] For its part, *Apocalypse Now* suggests that the United States' motivations behind the Vietnam War had more to do with political and economic influence than with colonising the territory. A chief difference between both situations lies in their historical outcome: while the colonisation of Africa brought large economical profit for the European countries involved, the American incursion in Indochina resulted in an infamous military defeat that undermined the image of the country.

As both novella and film reveal, Western efforts to impose their organisational competence –"the devotion to efficiency" (Conrad, 2012, 1956)– on other cultures led to an absolute loss of control. An unrestrained pursuit of efficiency, in fact, is a particular trait of Mr. Kurtz and Colonel Kurtz, both of them fully committed to "functionality – supposed to

[1] Naming in *Heart of Darkness* is elusive. Even Africa is only referred to as "the biggest, the most blank" spot in maps (2012, 1957). Critical agreement has linked the novella to Joseph Conrad's personal experiences and historical milieu, therefore claiming that the Company's headquarters are located in Brussels –only mentioned in the text as "the sepulchral city" (Conrad, 2012, 1970)– and that the African journey upriver occurs in the current territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. White and Finston (2010) make an interesting point by claiming that the trip does not take place along the Congo River, as most scholars have assumed, but along one of its tributaries.

lead to complete control over the world, but in effect leading to its destruction" (Maslowski, 2007, 204).

The production of Victorian commodities during the late nineteenth century demanded the continuous import of raw materials from the colonies, thus leading Said to claim that "during the 1890s the business of empire […] had become the empire of business" (1994, 23). *Heart of Darkness* reflects this reality by focusing on a trading company that gathers ivory from Africa. As their new recruit Marlow is sent to the continent, his narrative starts depicting unequal power relations between the colonisers and the colonised. On arriving at the Outer Station, Marlow beholds a chain-gang of Africans being enslaved and exploited by his partners, as well as a native being beaten and "screeching most horribly" (Conrad, 2012, 1969), thus validating Foucault's assertion that "it is in the nature of power […] to be repressive" (1978, 9). Racial subjugation does not even serve a practical purpose, as the company agents detonate pieces of ground which are not in the way of the railroad they are building. This "objectless blasting" is apparently performed out of leisure, hardly meeting any criteria of efficiency.

In the Vietnam context portrayed in *Apocalypse Now*, the American incursion was triggered by fear of an expansion of communism in Indochina (Brogan, 1999, 646-47). In a war setting, efficiency must be recontextualised: "techniques of power are invented to meet the demands of production […] in the broad sense– it can be a matter of the 'production' of destruction, as with the army" (Foucault, 1980, 161). The film's counterpart of the novella's Outer Station is the raid on the Vietnamese village led by arrogant Colonel Kilgore. In his introductory scene he throws playing cards on Vietnamese dead bodies, as this lets the Viet Cong "know who did this". In a swift movement from mercy to contempt, he tries to show some military morals by letting an enemy drink from his canteen, but when he notices the presence of a famous surfer in the area, the Vietnamese is abandoned to death. Ironically enough, a soldier with a megaphone tries to calm the local population in the middle of chaos: "We will not hurt or harm you. We are here to help you. We are here to extend a welcome hand". Worthy of note is the presence of an army priest conducting a Christian mass on the devastated beach while a helicopter lifts a water buffalo –a sacrificial symbol in local rites. The new beliefs try to supplant the old ones, thus imposing religion as a weapon of dominance and control (Hawley, 1996, 114).

The subsequent attack on the village constitutes a display of technological and symbolic power over a rural population devoid of advanced military means. On the first hand, the choice of this point of entry to the river is not a wise strategic decision, as resistance is to be found. However, Kilgore decides to explore the area because of its possibilities for the practice of surf, therefore exercising an abuse of power over both the locals and his own men. In the war environment nobody challenges his authority. It is not surprising that his final appearance in the film finds him worried about the idea of the war ending someday. Secondly, much has been commented on the visual power of this scene. Kilgore's cavalry hat, the Bugle Cavalry Charge signalling the helicopters' taking off, and Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" being played from the air as they are about to attack the village constitute what Hawley calls

"hyperbolic allusions" (1996, 114). Coppola uses cinematic devices to represent the power flow. The American Civil War imagery tries to evoke a past display of power in the present. According to Vargas, Kilgore's onscreen framing "consistently seen on the right side of the plane, almost always on the extreme right or walking from left to right [...] is a visual representation of the static, stubborn nature of the man and his extremist, right-wing, genocidal, and fascist tactics and inclinations" (2004, 98). This assessment is reinforced by the use of Wagner's music, already appropriated by the Nazis during World War II. In an ecstasy of frenzy, the villagers who try to escape into the jungle are quickly exterminated by napalm dropped from fighter planes. The film's extended version (*Apocalypse Now Redux*, 2001) uncovers the end of the battle: the tide changes because of the napalm, waves no longer break and, as a result, the beach is unfit for surf. The monumental display of force has been as useless as the "objectless blasting" of Conrad's story. The corollary of both episodes is that in extremely uncontrolled situations "anything can be done" (Conrad, 2012, 1976).

To examine representational power, it is fundamental to observe how the events are narrated in both the book and the film. In Conrad's text the Africans are referred to as "savages", "enemies", "rebels" and "criminals" before an indignant Marlow. Nonetheless, he calls them "cannibals", "negroes" and "niggers", the latter term being already offensive at the time *Heart of Darkness* was written (S. Smith, 1886, 75).[2] Throughout the novella the natives are referred to as "people" seven times, "natives" six times, "simple people" twice and "black people" only once. Biswas notes that "[t]he natives are mostly treated in a generalised way", sometimes also appearing as "symbolic abstractions" (2009, 163). In *Apocalypse Now* Col. Kilgore derogatorily calls the North Vietnamese "gooks" and "slopes". During the Vietnam War, the Viet Cong soldiers were collectively known as "Charlie", as this is the word standing for the letter "C" in the International Radiotelephony Spelling Alphabet, thus reducing a group of humans to a single letter. Another instance of reduction has to do with the army of Montagnard soldiers gathered by Kurtz. "Montagnard", French for "mountain people", is a single term used to refer to the members of almost two hundred different tribes depicted in the film as passive and easy to persuade, although they "historically are known to have been quite independent and strong" (Kinder, 1980, 16). Only six times are the Vietnamese or Cambodians called "people", and mostly by the non-military photojournalist at Kurtz's compound. Since power "is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (Foucault, 1978, 93), the power of representation influences perception.

Although generally mocked, not all natives are brutally enslaved in the novella. The text acknowledges the presence of "an armed escort of lank Zanzibaris" –native mercenaries– close to a white uniformed man (Conrad, 2012, 1966); "the savage who was fireman" is considered "an improved specimen" (2012, 1979); and, although mostly emphasising his incompetence, Marlow describes the black helmsman of his steamer in utilitarian terms (2012, 1985). Chinua Achebe draws attention to the "claim of distant kinship" Marlow finds

[2] However, Mastropierro and Conklin demonstrate in their reader-response analysis that the presence of such words does not reinforce the racist depiction of the locals in the text (2021, 34-35).

in the helmsman's look right when the latter dies, observing that the Englishman is more concerned about the claim than about kinship. An apparent strengthening of links from the European to the African highlights the existing distance between them –more consciously for Conrad than unconsciously for Marlow, Achebe suggests (2001, 1789). The natives gathered around both Kurtzes deserve special mention. Neither explicitly enslaved nor militarily threatened, they end up subdued to the Kurtzes by some obscure means. Their worship of the company agent and the US colonel, respectively, exemplifies Foucault's view that "[a]ll the modes of domination, submission, and subjugation are ultimately reduced to an effect of obedience" (1978, 85). The "unsound methods" through which Mr. Kurtz and Col. Kurtz gathered these natives around them remains a mystery.

Foucault's notion of the "apex" of power, the top of the pyramidal power structure in apparatuses "like an army or a factory" (1980, 159), is worth applying to the external context surrounding the events depicted in both works. Regarding the colonisation of Central Africa as portrayed in *Heart of Darkness*, Belgian King Leopold II would occupy said apex. As for the film's context, although Foucault's idea of power as "something which circulates" (1980, 98) implies complicity from the "lower elements of the hierarchy" (1980, 159), Vietnamese historian Nguyen Khac Vien states that "[m]en like Nixon, Kissinger, Huntington, Brzezinski, Carter, ordered the massacres from a distance, coldly and deliberately" (1980, 42). Nonetheless, the power flow is not steady. Cahir duly notes that the tape recorder that plays Col. Kurtz's messages in the army briefing was manufactured by Sony, a company from Japan –a former military enemy, now an economic ally of the USA: "Wars are not fought for timeless and eternal values, but for political or commercial expediency" (1992, 184). The novella exemplifies this idea in another briefing, that of Marlow with his aunt, whose idealisation of her nephew's trip as a "civilising" mission is met with his pragmatic observation that "the Company was run for profit" (Conrad, 2012, 1961).

However, "there are no relations of power without resistances" (Foucault, 1980, 142). The war context of *Apocalypse Now* allows the North Vietnamese and Cambodians to blow the Do Luong bridge every night, attack the Navy Patrol Boat in two occasions –causing the deaths of Clean and Chief– and reply to Col. Kilgore's invasion of the beach village with a machine gun and a grenade. In a scene full of symbolism, even the wild nature rebels against the American invaders in the form of a tiger. Counter-resistance is personified in Clean absurdly shooting back into the jungle, an action that finds its parallel in *Heart of Darkness* –"we came upon a man-of-war anchored off the coast. There wasn't even a shed there, and she was shelling the bush" (Conrad, 2012, 1962). As Wesley indicates, the first time the natives appear in the book is to resist the arrogance of Captain Fresleven,[3] whom they would eventually kill (2015, 9). Besides this event and the arrow-shooting attack, the novella mostly inscribes resistance in the anxiety of the colonisers, constantly afraid of the natives and the inscrutable nature around them –"[w]e were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings" (Conrad,

[3] Although at first sight the name Fresleven appears to be a compound of "free" and "slave", Conrad had learned about the actual death of a Captain Freiesleben in the Congo (Murfin, 1996, n.p.).

2012, 1979). K. Smith raises attention on the text's remarks on silence and quietness in the African setting, silence being revealed "as a largely invisible yet powerful weapon" (2009, 53); a similar claim is made by Guo (2011, 764) and Doherty (2017, 71) on the restraint of the locals, which clearly contrasts with the Europeans' lack of control. Ahn aptly notices how the African jungle exercises its own power over the Europeans' attempt at controlling it: "the African space's own historicity reminds the Europeans of the vastness of geological time, in which their temporary interruption looks insignificant" (2019, 713-14).

Regarding the arrow shooting at the colonisers, the Russian harlequin informs Marlow "that it was Kurtz who had ordered the attack" (Conrad, 2012, 2000), so that apparent resistance by the oppressed is only masquerading another resistance: that of Kurtz against a trading company which he fears wants to remove him from the position he has fought so hard to achieve. This situation is dramatically depicted in the film, where Col. Kurtz, after having been accused of murder by the US Army, turns from indignation –"[w]hat do you call it when the assassins accuse the assassin?"– to indifference –"[a]s for the charges against me, I am unconcerned. I am beyond their timid, lying morality". The main sin of both Kurtzes was to take their pursuit of efficiency too far. In the end they both advocated for radical measures demanding an absolute take on power. The novella's ivory trader, an "extremist" who "would have been a splendid leader of an extreme party [...]. Any party", as the journalist puts it (2012, 2007), advocates for exterminating "all the brutes!" (2012, 1990); the film's US colonel goes even further: "Drop the bomb. Exterminate them all!". Sun makes an interesting point by claiming that, in order for the imperialists to claim superior morals, their use of violence must be "civilized", either by their display of advanced technology or by its rationalisation "as part of a bureaucratic accounting procedure. This is the path taken by the imperialists at the central station in *Heart of Darkness* and staff headquarters in *Apocalypse Now*" (Sun, 2019, 66). Once the Kurtzes decide to wield unrestrained power, their professional success stands in the way of the imperialists' "illusion of moral superiority". They can no longer "remain a part of imperial society. [They] ha[ve] abandoned all the restraints and hypocrisies of western civilization" (2019, 67). Whatever they learned, discovered, and acknowledged in the process estranged them away from the power relations they were formerly involved in into a new web of power relations which finally led them to beholding "the horror" in their deathbeds.

3. "THE CHIEF'S BOAT": INTRA-ORGANISATIONAL HIERARCHIES

In theory, the army constitutes a typical example of absolute hierarchy where every link unquestioningly accepts orders from his/her superiors, while a company follows a functionalist structure with a less rigid chain of command. For both entities to be productive, a corporate ideology must be internalised by their members. As the individuals accept the norms and know their place in the institution, they become subject to organisational policies. According to French philosopher Louis Althusser, "ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, by the functioning of the category of the subject" (1970, 1504). The concept of interpellation is a useful one when studying power relations within

hierarchical structures. Althusser uses the army as an example of State institutions "teach[ing] […] 'know-how', but in forms which ensure subjection to the ruling ideology or the mastery of its 'practice'" (1970, 1485). The trading company in *Heart of Darkness* is not a state institution but, because of the extreme historical and geographical working conditions surrounding its operation, it treats its employees as interpellated subjects. In fact, it was their attempt at 'de-interpellation' which turned both Kurtzes into outlaws in the eyes of their respective organisations.

Marlow's first encounter with intra-organisational authority in *Heart of Darkness* takes place at the doctor's, from which he receives a condescending treatment legitimised by the discourse of medicine (Conrad, 2012, 1960). Once Marlow arrives to the Outer and later the Central Station, he acknowledges that the criteria of efficiency that any company "run for profit" should meet is hardly achieved in African soil, therefore supporting Foucault's idea that "[p]ower is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation", individuals being "always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power" (1980, 98). Power is continually misused and abused within an unstable hierarchy governed by the principles of influence and endurance. The chief accountant at the Outer Station lacks empathy by considering the groans of a wounded man next to his working desk an annoyance (2012, 1965); the idle brickmaker holds privileges denied to others of his rank because he "was the manager's spy upon them" (2012, 1969); besides conspiring against Kurtz, the general manager "had no genius for organizing, for initiative, or for order even […]. He had no learning, and no intelligence. His position had come to him—why? Perhaps because he was never ill […]. Because triumphant health in the general rout of constitutions is a kind of power in itself" (2012, 1968). Marlow is especially angry at what he considers an abuse of power on the manager's side –"He did not ask me to sit down after my twenty-mile walk that morning" (2012, 1967). But Marlow himself is not immune to the workings of power. His status within the company's African expedition increases as the story progresses, especially as he discovers that his having been recommended for the post by the wife of a high dignitary has granted him the respect of his peers. When he finally arrives to the Inner Station, his growing confidence encourages him to abuse power, shouting at the Russian harlequin and treating him with irony (2012, 1996-97). He validates Foucault's statement that "one should not assume a massive and primal condition of domination, a binary structure with 'dominators' on one side and 'dominated' on the other, but rather a multiform production of relations of domination which are partially susceptible of integration into overall strategies" (1980, 142).

In *Apocalypse Now*, the structure of the US Army is first introduced when a sergeant and a private come to Willard's hotel in Saigon to inform him about his new assignment. The captain's welcome sentence is "[w]hat are the charges?", thus evidencing his fear of the military institution's repressive power. At the briefing session in Nha Trang he shows a high respect for his superiors, whom he addresses as "sir". The American soldiers in *Apocalypse Now* mostly respect the chain of command, even if the orders are abusive and absurd –Col. Kilgore forcing two soldiers to surf the beach in the middle of the village attack immediately comes to mind. When Willard asks Chief what he thinks, the sailor's reply is unequivocal: "I

don't think. My orders say I'm not supposed to know where I'm taking this boat, so I don't!". These tokens of obedience illustrate Althusser's idea that the "State Apparatus functions massively and predominantly *by repression* (including physical repression), while functioning secondarily by ideology" (1970, 1490). The soldiers' profit on having been subjectified in the army –the reward of their interpellation– is their sense of freedom from the restraints of everyday life, the fulfilment of their longing for discovery, and their impunity in using weapons in a lawless war territory. Gelly appraises these apparent rewards with irony:

> Lance labelling his cannon "God's country," or Clean labelling the shield placed in front of his machine gun "canned heat"–suggesting the phrase "canned meat" [...] work in an ironical way towards a debunking of what they seem to claim: Lance's reality revolves not around God but around a puppy, [...] while the phrase "canned heat" ironically describes the reality of the men as cannon fodder in that war (2000, 16).

Nevertheless, when hierarchy and regulations collide persuasion comes into play. When the Navy Patrol Boat arrives in Hau Phat, the sergeant in charge of the supplies denies assistance to the boat crew because of their not having a destination (it was classified). Strictly complying with the rules, he even disobeys Captain Willard –a superior–, but only until the latter threateningly grabs him by his chest and throws him flat on a table. Such a harsh reminder quickly restores the chain of command. The need for such a tight authority structure is made evident in the Do Luong bridge scene. The lack of a Commanding Officer leads the regiment to disorganisation and chaos. The soldiers are aimless, trapped in a trench while the bridge is destroyed and rebuilt every day. A few of them swim towards the boat desperately yelling: "Take me home!". Foucault also uses the analogy of a chain to describe how power circulates, instead of being exclusively controlled or denied by some (1980, 98). The scenes at Do Luong bridge exemplify how breaking the chain of command disables the chain of power.

An element deserving special attention in both works is the boat, as it constitutes a microcosm of power of its own which transversally intertwines with the power relations that surround it. Hawley says that it "serves for Coppola, as it does for Conrad, as an extension of civilization. The boat provides a human-made 'safe space' for Marlow and Willard" (1996, 115). Onboard a ship the captain is the main authority, even if this leads to conflict with coexisting power structures. When the steamer in *Heart of Darkness* is surrounded by fog, the manager authorises his theoretical subordinate Marlow "to take all the risks", to what he replies: "I refuse to take any" (Conrad, 2012, 1984). Incompatibility of hierarchies is even more evident in *Apocalypse Now*. When the journey through the river begins, Willard's voice-over acknowledges: "It might have been my mission, but it sure as shit was the Chief's boat". Chief himself makes it clear in his addresses to Willard –"Until we reach your destination, Captain, you're just on for the ride"– and Chef –"this ain't the Army. You are a sailor!".

Both boats lead to the mysterious Kurtz, a formerly remarkable professional who broke the hierarchy at some point to inaugurate a new web of power relations with the natives. According to the manager, Conrad's Kurtz "was the best agent he had, an exceptional man, of

the greatest importance to the Company" (2012, 1968). Nobody sent more ivory than him. As for *Apocalypse Now*'s Kurtz, the general in Nha Trang assesses him as "one of the most outstanding officers this country's ever produced". He was so valuable to the army that, after having been denied a transfer twice, "when he threatened to resign, they gave it to him". Anyway, the methods of both Kurtzes are considered "unsound" by their employers, for which reason the ivory trader is abandoned to his illness[4] and the army colonel "terminate[d] with extreme prejudice". Their sin was taking efficiency too far, thus exemplifying Foucault's assertion that society "denounces the power it exercises" (1978, 8).

4. "TOO BEAUTIFUL ALTOGETHER": THE ROLE OF GENDER

As the presence and narrative function of women differs significantly in novella and film, I will discuss them separately. The role of female characters in *Heart of Darkness* may be analysed regarding three elements. First of all, and ironically, concerning their absence. The story is a manly adventure of colonisation told in a male sailors' meeting. Conway highlights that the Nellie, the boat where the telling of the story takes place, is the only female character with a name.[5] She emphasises how static women are in such an adventurous story: "Conrad's women are powerless to cross the limits of nation, culture, and ideology. While Conrad's male characters acquire experience of multiple continents, his three female characters – the Intended, the African woman, and Marlow's aunt – are permitted experience of either Europe or Africa, but not both" (2013, 104). Biswas contributes a different view: "A woman character set at the centre of all imperialistic-colonial activities would only be unreal and therefore unconvincing" (2009, 156), and adds that "Conrad allows only a little space to the women in the actual text, but leaves a huge space to derive meaning from" (2009, 158). This appraisal leads to the second aspect to observe concerning female characters: symbolism. The two main women in the text, Kurtz's Intended and the African woman,[6] respectively represent Europe and Africa. The Intended is serious, well-mannered, and ignorant of the inner workings of colonialism, as most Europeans were at the time. The African woman is wild and savage, and "must have had the value of several elephant tusks upon her" (Conrad, 2012, 1998). As the image of Africa, she is to be colonised and valued in economic terms.

Thirdly, and perhaps surprisingly, women do also stand for power. It was Marlow's aunt who granted him the position in the company by using as an influence her friendship with another woman, the wife of a high dignitary. "She has no idea of the colonial rules, but she has an effective power over those who rule the colonies" (Biswas, 2009, 158). The "superb" African

[4] Watts makes an interesting claim that a plot to murder Kurtz might be evident in *Heart of Darkness* (2012, 71).

[5] It should be noted, however, that most male characters are also unnamed in the novella. Only two active characters have a name: Marlow and Kurtz.

[6] I agree with McIntire that, although "it has become something of a critical convention to call this woman 'Kurtz's African mistress,' she is never explicitly named or designated as such" (2002, 281).

woman is one of the most powerful characters in the book. She is able to conduct the "wild mob" of natives by shouting at them (Conrad, 2012, 2003) and, according to Dilworth, she may have influenced Kurtz himself (1987, 519). K. Smith explicitly applies her aforementioned remarks on the power of silence on the African woman, who "imitates and employs this same formidable silence in her interactions with the colonizers" (2009, 53). However, Dilworth remarks that she "stands to lose power, prestige, and wealth if Kurtz dies or departs, or if another takes his place" (1987, 520).

As for the Intended, Dilworth asserts that she is "a dominant, assertive person", "dominate[s] Marlow in conversation", and may have also influenced Kurtz (1987, 519-20). Ellis even associates her with "the horror" Kurtz beholds in his deathbed, as it was her naivety which led him to African soil (1976, 107). In a more traditional reading of the text, Hawthorn circumscribes female power: "imperialism demands that sections of the domestic power retain their illusions, and thus the human relationships of that domestic power are impregnated by the lies of imperialism through and through" (qtd. in Guo, 2015, 766). Dilworth delves into the gender-power issue by claiming that the Intended "exults in the assurance that she possessed Kurtz to the very end, possibly because to her he represents power", as "[i]n the nineteenth century, the only means to social or political power for most women was a powerful man" (1987, 519). The strongest display of power in the gender web, however, might be Marlow's lie to the Intended regarding Kurtz's last words, and which must be studied through Foucault's prism: "The confession is a ritual of discourse [...] that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence [...] of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile" (1978, 61-62). This failed attempt at confession prevents the patriarchal environment from change. Men proceed with their colonial enterprises while women remain ignorant in a "world of their own" (Conrad, 2012, 1961). As Foucault states, "truth is not by nature free [...] but [...] its production is thoroughly imbued with relations of power" (1978, 60); "[r]elations of power are not in a position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationships [...]; they are the immediate effects of the divisions, inequalities, and disequilibriums which occur in the latter" (1978, 94). De la Rochère links this notion with the novella: "'Heart of Darkness' can [...] be read as a deeply ambivalent reflection on the collaboration between imperial and patriarchal structures" (2008, 8).

As Hayes (1997) summarises, an ample body of work has already been written on the representational role of women in *Heart of Darkness*, mostly accusing the novella of portraying women derogatorily. Marlow's remarks on women's lives being "too beautiful altogether", and their being "out of touch with truth" (Conrad, 2012, 1961) have been widely commented. Quoting Hélène Cixous, J. Smith states that "Marlow's narrative is a mystification of power relations that shows that '[men] want to keep woman in the place of mystery, consign her to mystery, as they say «keep her in her place, keep her at a distance»'" (1996, n. p.). Although Conrad is mostly criticised based on his gender views, Watts makes an

interesting point at separating the author from his literary work, thus accusing of presentism all those indignant with the artist's patriarchal stance (1996, 57).

In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow says that women "should be out of it" (Conrad, 2012, 1988). In *Apocalypse Now*, Coppola made a strong effort to follow these words by presenting the war as an almost exclusively manly struggle. The first female appearance onscreen occurs no sooner than 26'45", as a local old woman holds a wounded child in the middle of an army operation. The Vietnamese women are mostly consigned to domestic chores, save for the female soldier who warns the coastal village of the US Army's raid, and for her courageous neighbour who makes a grenade explode in one of the American helicopters –and who is consequently killed by Kilgore's troops. The attempt of the woman in the sampan to protect her puppy triggers nervousness in Clean, who massacres the whole boat. As she is dying Willard finishes her off, since taking care of her would be a burden to his mission. In Kurtz's compound a local woman is constantly staring at him, being the first to notice his murder. She plays the part of Conrad's African woman, but as a simple beholder deprived of any agency. The presence of native female characters is tolerated in the film only as long as they do not hold any kind of power. Worthy suggests that women in the film are men's other, in the same way that the Vietnamese are the Americans' other (1996, 156-57).

The only American women physically appearing in the film are the Playboy bunnies in the USO show at Hau Phat. Their performance as "domesticated and softened versions of pornographic strippers", as well as the effect it causes in the soldiers –"storm[ing] the stage in an epic gang rape" (Norris, 1998, 737)– constitute an obvious example of female reification. Apparently, there is only one powerful woman in the film: Willard's wife, who obtained his "yes to a divorce".

5. Conclusion

Heart of Darkness and *Apocalypse Now* explore the consequences of extreme exercises of power being contested with extreme exercises of power. The anxiety of the European colonisers in Africa and the defeat of the US Army in Vietnam are challenged by both Kurtzes as they overuse the already enormous margins of power they had been granted. Their failure stems mostly from the outrageousness of their power display, since restraint is of the essence:

> power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms. Would power be accepted if it were entirely cynical? For it, secrecy is not in the nature of an abuse; it is indispensable to its operation. Not only because power imposes secrecy on those whom it dominates, but because it is perhaps just as indispensable to the latter: would they accept it if they did not see it as a mere limit placed on their desire, leaving a measure of freedom –however slight– intact? Power as a pure limit set on freedom is, at least in our society, the general form of its acceptability (Foucault, 1978, 86).

That slight measure of freedom is what allows patriarchal power to succeed in the novella as it keeps its own secrecy from female characters. However, the power amassed by the Kurtzes is intolerable in the eyes of their respective organisations –the trading company in the novella, the US Army in the film–, which fear their lack of restraint and decide to stop the situation immediately.

Eventually, both Kurtzes face power's ultimate boundary: "it is over life [...] that power establishes its dominion; death is power's limit, the moment that escapes it" (1978, 138). Fear, threat, and execution of death surround both works. Death is the ultimate power and also its final stage, that where the story of Mr. Kurtz and Col. Kurtz ends. Their final attempt at liberation through confession corresponds to both of them uttering "The horror! The horror!" in their deathbeds. The reason behind the confession mechanism failing in both cases is that it requires an "interlocutor" who is also an "authority" (Foucault, 1978, 61). Marlow and Willard fulfil the first requirement, but not the second. The former's lie to the Intended and the second's lack of articulation after Col. Kurtz's death have the double effect of preventing the truth from reaching their white, Western, colonising societies, and of stopping the Kurtzes from liberation. If "[c]onfession frees, but power reduces one to silence" (Foucault, 1978, 60), Mr. Kurtz and Col. Kurtz face their respective demises trapped in the power web by lack of effective confession.

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